

News Flash:

Children at Risk of Trafficking

- with a special focus on children in migration and on young asylum seekers -

Concerned about the situation in the Baltic Sea Region, some 30 experts from nine countries around the Baltic Sea met in Copenhagen on the 15th and 16th of June 2010 to discuss how information channels and structures established among various groups of professionals can become a stronger tool in the endeavour to build comprehensive and adequate protection systems for children and youth at risk of trafficking.

By way of introduction, Mr. Lars Lööf, Head of Children's Unit, Council of Baltic Sea States, underlined that information about the issue is a very powerful tool. However, he stressed, we face a very challenging situation as a major part of available information builds on anecdotal evidence, unsubstantiated suspicions and not on experiences from meetings with children and young people.

In all countries around the Baltic Sea the number of cases in court where the victim of the crime is a child, is very low. At the same time the experts at the seminar agreed that a considerable number of the current young asylum seekers are at risk of being exploited and thus become victims of trafficking due to their vulnerability and there are considerable numbers of migrant street children unaccounted for and children not being identified by any authority.

The experts at the Copenhagen seminar discussed modes of operation in interchanges of experiences and information among groups of professionals at all levels reaching from local to international. A particular point of entry was centred around protection and the rights of the child. In the light of the very big influx of asylum seeking children and young people it was considered worrisome with the limited resources to ensure the best possible care of the individual child.

A range of issues were addressed during the seminar, some of the most significant being:

- The numbers of trafficked children remain a challenge as facts and valid figures on victims of trafficking can not be agreed on due to opposing interests among different stakeholders. – Is listing varying numbers, representing the findings from different professional groups a practice to be adopted more broadly?
- International law related to national procedures – when the crime of trafficking has taken place in another country can the victim be protected as a victim of trafficking in the country where s/he presently resides? It was suggested that not protecting and identifying victims of trafficking crimes committed in other countries, may be a violation of the Palermo protocol (UN, 2000: On combating trafficking in human beings).
- There are problems with the identification of children from 'fake families' or minors staying within ethnic minority communities making suspicions of trafficking difficult to verify.
- Challenges are linked to establishing age, nationality and travel routes, for instance – and the information across national borders is often sparse.

- The asylum centres are under pressure due to insufficient resources and disappearances from these centres seem to be a major problem. – Is it in particular the Dublin convention that tends to push young people into leaving asylum centres or are other push and pull factors present?

The Copenhagen seminar is number two in a series of three, where the first seminar, that took place in Vilnius, focused on sexual exploitation, while the next and final seminar will take place in Tallinn. The last expert seminar will be devoted to the issues of children being exploited in forced labour and criminality and links to trafficking.. The expert seminars all feed into a final report, which will map and analyse trends in existing information streams and provide recommendations on how to refine and upgrade information management with the aim to improve protection of children at risk of trafficking in the countries in the Baltic Sea Region.